

Humanities Seminars Program

The Harlem Renaissance

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Description

In the 1920s and 1930s, the soulful rhythms of blues and jazz signaled an explosion of African American creativity. During this period, known as the New Negro Movement and later known as the Harlem Renaissance, musicians, dancers, visual artists, writers, and scholars sought to define their African heritage in American culture. During the period from just after World War I until just after the stock market crash in 1929, the vibrancy of the newly discovered African American art, music and literature were celebrated in Harlem, New York. Why Harlem? Several factors contributed to this place and time. New York had long been considered the cultural capital of the country and Harlem experienced a large growth in population as thousands of blacks migrated to the area. Harlem was also the national headquarters for recently founded organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, The United Negro Improvement Association, and the Urban League. Black pride in Harlem was represented by two large parades, which happened at the end of World War I. In 1917, more than 10,000 blacks had marched in silence to protest against anti-black violence, and in 1919, blacks marched again to celebrate the homecoming of the highly decorated, all-black 369th Infantry from their service in WWI. Harlem was not a ghetto; it was a black city. The Harlem Renaissance is considered the first important movement of black artists and writers in the US. Centered in Harlem, NY during the 1920s, black writers and artists produced more than ever before.

Methodology

This course will be taught as an “Enhanced Discussion”, meaning that in addition to discussing assigned readings, we will also review other forms of popular media of the period to include:

- Music
- Art
- Film
- Photography

Members of this Seminar will experience the Harlem Renaissance on several levels. You will first be guided through representative texts and historical descriptions of the period obtaining information about African American life and culture leading up to and during the 1920s and early 30s. You will look for information regarding context, inspiration, motivations and debates surrounding the works we read, and the music and films and other creative forms of expression we experience.

Required Readings:

Lewis, David Levering. The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader. New York: The Penguin Group, 1994.

Lewis, David Levering. When Harlem Was in Vogue. New York: The Penguin, 1997.

Course Schedule

Week 1 October 11	Course Introduction, overview of readings and activities, introduction to the Harlem Renaissance Read: pgs 1-49 in When Harlem was in Vogue (Lewis) read pgs 3-45 in The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader (Lewis).
Week 2 October 18	Discuss readings from last week. Answer questions. View Film: "I Remember Harlem". Discuss pertinent Points. Read: pgs 50 – 118 in When Harlem was in Vogue (Lewis) AND pgs 46 – 105 in The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader (Lewis).
Week 3 October 25	Discuss readings from last week. Answer questions. View Film: CSPAN-Hughes and Hurston. Discuss pertinent points. Read: pgs 119 – 239 in When Harlem was in Vogue (Lewis) and pgs 106 – 141, 257 – 270, and 695 – 728 in The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader (Lewis).
Week 4 November 1	Discuss readings from last week. Answer questions. View Film Against the Odds (art of the HR). Discuss context and the Jazz Age in Paris. Read: pgs 142 – 218 in The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader (Lewis) AND Jean Toomer, Jessie Fauset, Nella Larsen, Angelina Weld Grimke.
Week 5 November 8	Discuss readings from last week, Answer any questions. Video on entertainment of the period. Assignment: Read pgs 240 – 307 in When Harlem was in Vogue (Lewis).